

POST TRAINING REPORT INTERNET GOVERNANCE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN PAKISTAN

26-28 December 2023
Ramada Hotel, Islamabad



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Introduction:

The Path Finder Solutions (Private) Limited, in collaboration with the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and the Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group, successfully organized a groundbreaking Leadership Training on Internet Governance for persons with disabilities in Pakistan from December 26 to December 28, 2023, at the Ramada Hotel Islamabad. This training initiative was the first ever national level training for persons with disabilities in the internet governance domain.

Background:

The Asia-Pacific School on Internet Governance (APSIG) in partnership with the Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group organized a train the trainer workshop on Leadership Training on Internet Governance and Digital Rights for Persons with Disabilities from June 24th to 28th 2022 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. This initiative aimed to build the leadership capacities of South Asian disability advocates in Internet governance and transfer these skills to their own countries through the organizing of national workshops. Dr. Muhammad Shabbir, the Chief Executive of Path Finder Solutions, participated in Dhaka workshop as facilitator and a participant.¹

At Path Finder Solutions, we believe that technology should be accessible to everyone at the same time and at no additional cost, regardless of impairment or ability. By working towards our mission and objectives, we are striving towards a more inclusive and equal society for all. Our team is dedicated to making a difference in the lives of people with disabilities by empowering them with accessible technology. We envision a world where individuals with disabilities have equal access to technology, opportunities, and resources, enabling them to achieve their full potential. Our mission is to empower people with disabilities through accessible technology solutions and resources. We aim to conduct cutting-edge research on accessibility, provide web/digital accessibility audits and solutions, conduct training in accessibility, and promote low-cost accessibility solutions for the developing world.

Building upon the success of the Dhaka workshop, Path Finder Solutions conducted a face-to-face workshop in Islamabad, Pakistan with the support of Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority. The workshop included Dr. Muhammad Shabbir as the organizer and resource person, along with other experts in the field.

¹ <https://www.apsig.asia/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Dhaka-Report-public.pdf>

General Overview:

The workshop aimed to empower individuals with disabilities to become leaders in advocating for accessibility, digital rights, and fostering an inclusive Internet governance landscape. It brought together 21 participants, including 12 visually impaired, 5 physically impaired, 3 deaf / hard of hearing, and 1 with double disability (physical and cognitive). There were 12 male and 9 female participants, representing various regions of Pakistan, including: Rawalpindi/Islamabad, Lahore, Abbottabad, Faisalabad, Karachi, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Quetta. Thus, there was a good balance of disability, gender and geographic diversity in terms of participant's selection for the training. Due to the time constraints, there was no advertisement or call for applications. However, key people and organizations were approached to take part as well as some requests were received when the word went out that such a training was being organized. The final selection of the participants was made by Dr. Muhammad Shabbir keeping in view the aforementioned balance. One female participant dropped due to health reasons. The list of successful participants is at annexure-1.

The first day of training program commenced with the recitation of the Holy Quran, followed by a warm welcome from Dr. Muhammad Shabbir, CEO of Path Finder Solutions; video message from Gunela Astbrink, Chair of the ISOC Accessibility Standing Group; and the participants introduction. The day progressed with sessions covering the introduction to Internet Governance, key stakeholders, leadership skills, digital accessibility standards, and advocacy techniques. The day concluded with a summary of day 1 and a preview of Day 2.

Sessions on the second day delved into topics such as privacy and digital security, Pakistan's digital ecosystem, internet fellowships and grants, funding proposals, showcasing accessibility solutions, and discussions on digital accessibility policies and the Right to Information landscape in Pakistan. The day ended with a summary and a glimpse of the agenda for the final day.

The last day featured feedback and future commitments by the participants, a debate on digital accessibility in Pakistan, and the closing ceremony. This included remarks by Naveed Haq from the Internet Society, distribution of shields and certificates, remarks by Dr. Muhammad Shabbir, and an address by the Chief Guest, Maj. Gen. (R) Hafeez Ur Rehman, Chairman PTA. The detailed program is at annexure-2.

Venue:

The choice of the Ramada Hotel Islamabad provided a conducive and accessible environment for all participants. While the conference venue was fully accessible, it's noted that the hotel had limited rooms with wheelchair facilities.

Accessibility Measures:

To ensure inclusivity, the organizers engaged the services of sign language interpreters and male and female assistants to facilitate participants throughout the workshop.

Logistics:

Logistical arrangements, including registration processes, provision of materials, and technical support, were executed seamlessly. The hotel staff and the organizing team's collaborative efforts ensured smooth operations throughout the workshop.

Special Guests:

Pathfinder Solutions extended an invitation to the Chairman of PTA to be the Chief Guest at the certificate award ceremony, adding a distinguished touch to the event. The certificate award ceremony was widely covered in print media. Annexure-3 carries a list of links of some of the news reports. Picture Gallery offers some glimpses of the workshop.

Findings:

The workshop facilitated in-depth discussions on crucial topics such as digital accessibility, Internet governance policies, and advocacy skills. Participants actively engaged in practical exercises, group discussions, and knowledge-sharing sessions. The key findings include:

- a. Internet Governance is a very vast field and there are very few persons with disabilities contributing in it.
- b. There are number of opportunities for individuals and organizations to collaborate, engage and advocate in the IG domain. Persons with disabilities and their organizations in Pakistan should actively contribute in those discussions.
- c. The participants of this leadership training were willing to also organize in person trainings or online sessions on IG and digital accessibility for persons with disabilities in their respective cities and organizations.
- d. Participants now have a heightened awareness of available funding opportunities, fellowships, and grants in the field of IG. This knowledge positions them to secure resources for their projects, ensuring sustainability and scalability of their efforts.
- e. The training has deepened participants' understanding of local digital accessibility policies and the Right to Information landscape in Pakistan. This awareness ensures that advocacy efforts align with national regulations, facilitating a more effective and strategic approach.
- f. There is a need to foster partnerships with industry stakeholders, tech companies, and organizations dedicated to accessibility. Collaborations with these entities can provide resources, mentorship, and opportunities for participants to implement and scale their accessibility solutions.

- g. The continuation and expansion of similar training programs, forging partnerships with relevant organizations, enhancing outreach strategies, and integrating more hands-on activities into future workshops is recommended.

Next Steps:

The sessions on third day were designed to gain participants' feedback on the training, their future commitments and strategies for the next steps. It was reiterated that all the successful participants of the workshop will write individual reports outlining their key learnings from the training and how they planned to implement those learnings. The participants reports (unedited) are linked with this report and can be accessed by clicking on the name of the participant in Annexure-1.

In his remarks during the certificate award ceremony, Dr Muhammad Shabbir on behalf of the training participants proposed some measures to Chairman PTA for implementation. The Chairman assured that his office will exercise his powers to implement these recommendations and also invited Dr. Muhammad Shabbir for more discussion on these recommendations in his office at PTA. The recommendations are as following:

1. Instruct PTA's web development team to make its websites and online systems such as DIRBS accessible to WCAG2.1 AA level standards for persons with disabilities. Moreover, consider the inclusion of persons with disabilities in PTA's gender inclusion and child online protection programs.
2. Instruct telcos and ISPs to make their websites and applications accessible to WCAG2.1 AA standards for persons with disabilities and establish mechanisms to ensure that these standards are maintained as content is updated.
3. Encourage telcos and ISPs to provide special low-cost internet and call packages for persons with disabilities through their CSR programs, facilitating their communication needs.
4. Recommend, as a board member to USF, that the Universal Service Fund should be leveraged to facilitate digital connectivity for persons with disabilities and enable them to access low-cost digital devices.
5. Advise the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MOITT) to establish a proper mechanism ensuring the accessibility of all public sector websites for persons with disabilities.
6. Suggest to MOITT that, based on the principle of 'nothing about us without us,' every public consultation should include the input of persons with disabilities.

Conclusion:

To conclude, the Disability Leadership Training on Internet Governance has not only imparted knowledge but has also ignited a spark of empowerment, collaboration, and advocacy. This journey commenced with a vision — a vision to empower individuals with disabilities to become leaders in advocating for digital rights. The principle of "nothing about us without us" echoed in every aspect of this workshop. This program is a testament to the belief that true change is driven by the very individuals it seeks to empower. It is about the voices of those directly affected being at the forefront of advocacy and leadership. The participants, now equipped with enhanced skills and networks, are poised to lead the charge for a more inclusive and accessible digital landscape in Pakistan and beyond. The impact of this training extends beyond the workshop, laying the foundation for positive change in the digital realm.

Acknowledgements:

The success of the workshop is attributed to the collaborative efforts of Pathfinder Solutions (Private) Limited, PTA, and the Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group. Thanks to ISOC Accessibility Standing Group and PTA for supporting the training and the organizing team for their unwavering commitment to organize it in a very short time. My special thanks to Mr. Waqas Hassan for advising me at every step and working with me day and night in the arrangements of the training. He truly was as he himself put it, my “eyes” before, during and after the training. Thanks are also due to the event manager Mr. Imran Khatak and his team for their wonderful support to organize the training. Last but not the least, I want to express heartfelt appreciation to every participant, speaker, and facilitator who contributed their time, knowledge, and passion to this training program. Your stories, experiences, and insights have woven the fabric of this workshop, creating a tapestry of understanding and collaboration that extends beyond the 3 days and walls of conference room.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir.

Chief Executive,

Path Finder Solutions (Private) Limited.

Annexure-1**Participants List**

S/No	Name	Designation/Organization	Disability if any
1	Shazia Munawar	Early Childhood Education Consultant	Hearing Impaired
2	Farhad Shahid	IT and Mobility Instructor, Pakistan Foundation Fighting Blindness	Visually Impaired
3	Haq Nawaz	Low Vision Counselor	Physically impaired
4	Muhammad Shafiq		Visually Impaired
5	Maira Arif	Project Associate, School of Leadership Foundation	Visually Impaired
6	Aiman Zaheer	Lecturer, Punjab Higher Education Department	Visually Impaired
7	Dr Anwar Ali	Assistant Professor at GCU, Faisalabad and Director Finance, PCB Blind Team	Visually Impaired
8	Salman Khalid	Lecturer, Govt Degree College, Lahore	Visually Impaired
9	Nadia Saba	Pakistan Foundation Fighting Blindness, Islamabad	Visually Impaired
10	Rehana Zahid	Women Wing Head, Sir Syed Deaf Association	Hearing Impaired
11	Ammarah Talha	Co-Owner, Fresh N Frozen	Hearing Impaired
12	Muneer Kazmi	PhD Food Science and Technology	Visually impaired and CP
13	Waqas Ramzan	IT Executive, Blinder Project	Visually Impaired
14	Muhammad Bilal Nawaz	Chairperson, Right to Live Organization	Visually Impaired
15	Naureel Abbas	President, Team Dreams	Physical
16	Syed Tayyab Ali Naqvi	Zonal Manager, HBL Konnect	Physical
17	Sundas Arooj	Chief Executive, Arham Academy	Visually Impaired
18	Saima Aslam	National Coordinator, National Forum of Women with Disabilities	Physical
19	Muhammad Bilal Satti	Assistant Professor	Visually Impaired
20	Ali Tareen	CEO, KFK	Visually Impaired

Annexure-2

Program

Day-1 Tuesday, 26th December

9:00: Recitation of the Holy Quran
9:02: Welcome by Dr. Muhammad Shabbir, CEO, Path Finder Solutions
9:07: Remarks by Gunela Astbrink, Chair, ISOC Accessibility Standing Group
9:15: Participants Introduction
9:45: Introduction to Internet Governance, Mr. Zakir Syed, Director (Internet Governance), MoIT
11:00: Coffee break
11:15: Key stakeholders of Internet Governance
Mr. Waqas Hasan, Vice-Chair, Asia-Pacific School on Internet Governance
Dr. Muhammad Shabbir, CEO, Path Finder Solutions
12:45: Lunch
14:00: Leadership, Persuasion Skills, Building Personal Networks and Trust Mr. Naureel Abbas, President, WheelChairwala
14:45: Digital Accessibility Standards, Dr. Muhammad Shabbir CEO, Path Finder Solutions
15:30: Coffee break
15:50: Advocacy Skills and Techniques, Elevator Pitch: Group Exercise, Moderated by Abia Akram, Chair, National Forum of Women with Disabilities
17:00: Summary of Day 1 and Plan for Day 2, Dr. Muhammad Shabbir, CEO, Path Finder Solutions

Day 2 Wednesday, 27th December

9:00: Privacy and Digital Security, Mr. Mubashir Sargana, Cyber Security Expert AND Dr. Aqil Sajjad, Research Scientist, University of Arizona, USA
10:30: Coffee break
10:50: Digital Ecosystem of Pakistan, Mr. Zakir Syed, Director (Internet Governance), MoIT
12:00: Internet Fellowships and Grants, Mr. Waqas Hassan, Vice-Chair, Asia-Pacific School on Internet Governance
12:45 Lunch break
13:45 Funding, Fellowship, or Workshop Proposals (group exercise), Mr. Waqas Hassan, Vice-Chair, BoD, ISOC Islamabad Chapter
14:30: Showcasing Accessibility Solutions, DeafTawk, WheelChairWala
15:20 Coffee break
15:40: Digital accessibility policies and Right to Information Landscape in Pakistan, Mr. Zahid Abdullah, Former Federal Information Commissioner, and Advisor, CPDI
16:45: Summary of Day 2 and Plan for Day 3, Dr. Muhammad Shabbir, CEO, Path Finder Solutions

Day 3, Thursday 28th December

9:00: Feedback and Future Commitments, Moderated by: Mr. Waqas Hassan, Vice-Chair, Asia-Pacific School on Internet Governance and Dr. Muhammad Shabbir, CEO, Path Finder Solutions

10:30: Coffee break

10:50 Debate on Digital Accessibility in Pakistan, Moderated by Mr. Naveed Haq, Director, Infrastructure & Connectivity, Internet Society

12:00: Closing Ceremony

Recitation

Remarks by Naveed Haq, Director infrastructure and Connectivity, Internet Society (5 min)

Shields & Certificate Distribution

Remarks by Dr. Muhammad Shabbir, CEO, Pathfinders Solutions (10 min)

Address by Chief Guest: Maj. Gen. (R) Hafeez Ur Rehman, Chairman PTA (15 min)

13:00: Lunch

End of workshop

Annexure-3

Media Coverage:

The news of certificate award ceremony of the training was carried by a number of media channels. The links of some of the news are given below:

<https://pakobserver.net/leadership-training-in-internet-governance-for-pwd-concludes/>

<https://www.app.com.pk/national/leadership-training-in-internet-governance-for-persons-with-disabilities-concluded/>

<https://www.urdupoint.com/en/pakistan/leadership-training-in-internet-governance-for-1781022.html>

<https://www.phoneworld.com.pk/leadership-training-in-internet-governance-for-persons-with-disabilities-concludes/>

<https://www.incpak.com/national/leadership-training-in-internet-governance-for-persons-with-disabilities-concludes/>

<https://dnd.com.pk/ptas-leadership-training-in-internet-governance-for-disabled-persons-concludes/308504>

<https://en.wenews.pk/digital-empowerment-three-day-disability-leadership-training-concludes-in-islamabad/>

<https://chinaconnect.com.pk/leadership-training-in-internet-governance-for-persons-with-disabilities-concludes/>

<https://chinaobserver.pk/leadership-training-in-internet-governance-for-persons-with-disabilities-concludes/>

https://www.express.com.pk/epaper/PoPupwindow.aspx?newsID=1110711047&Issue=NP_ISB&Date=20231229

Pictures Gallery

Group Photo with Chief Guest Chairman PTA Maj. Gen (R) Hafeez Ur Rehman HI (M).



Chief Guest Chairman PTA Maj. Gen (R) Hafeez Ur Rehman HI (M) and other guests while attending the closing ceremony of the training.



Group photo of the participants together with the organizers.



Mr. Muhammad Bilal Satti, Mr. Ali Tareen, Haq Nawaz, Muhammad Shafiq together sitting on a round table during the closing ceremony.



Mr. Waqas Hassan, Vice-Chair, Asia-Pacific School on Internet Governance speaking with the participants of the training in the picture and Ms. Umera Amat Rana, From PTA, Host of the Closing Ceremony together in a picture.







Dr. Muhammad Shabbir, CEO, Path Finder Solutions speaking to the participants.



Mr. Naureel Abbas, President, WheelChairwala speaking to the audience.



<p>Mr. Naveed Haq, Director, Infrastructure & Connectivity, Internet Society speaking to the audience.</p>	
<p>Mr. Zakir Syed, Director (Internet Governance), MoIT speaking to the audience.</p>	
<p>Mr. Waqas Hassan, Vice-Chair, Asia-Pacific School on Internet Governance speaking to the participants.</p>	
<p>From Left to Right Front Row,</p> <p>Mr. Tayyab Ali Naqvi, Ms. Maria Qureshi, Ms. Abia Akram, Mr. Naureel Abbas, Ms. Maria Qureshi.</p> <p>2nd Row from Left to Right,</p> <p>Mr. Ammar, Ms. Areeba Shabbir, Ms. Rimsha Shabbir, Ms. Nadia Saba and Ms. Sundas Arooj.</p>	

Group Photo of the Participants together with Mr. Shabbir Awan, Chief Executive, Path Finder Solutions.



Ms. Shazia Gulzar and Ms. Rehana Zahid with Ms. Aiman Zaheer doing a group activity during one of the sessions.



Chairman PTA Maj Gen Hafeez Ur Rehman HI (M), Mr. Muhammad Shabbir, Chief Executive Path Finder Solutions and Mr. Naveed Ul Haq, Director, Internet Society presenting certificate to Ms. Saima Aslam, National Coordinator, National Forum of Women with Disabilities.



Mr. Muhammad Shabbir, Chief Executive, Path Finder Solutions presenting a shield to Chief Guest, Chairman PTA, Maj Gen Hafeez Ur Rehman HI (M)



Chairman PTA, Maj Gen Hafeez Ur Rehman HI (M) speaking to the audience.



Ms. Umer Asmat Rana, Host of the Closing Ceremony speaking to the audience.



Female participants with the Chief Guest Chairman PTA, Maj Gen. Hafeez Ur Rehman HI (M) including Ms. Shazia Gulzar, Ms. Rehana Zahid, Daughter of Ms. Rehana Zahid, Ms. Nazia Intizar, Ms. Ammarah Talha.



Mr. Ali Tareen and Mr. Muhammad Bilal interacting with Chairman PTA Maj Gen. Hafeez Ur Rehman HI (M).



Ms. Areeba Shabbir, Ms. Umera Asmat Rana, Ms. Rimsha Shabbir and Ms. Nazia Intizar together during the training.



Participants of the training while attending the training.



Mr. Mubashir Sargana, Cyber Security Expert speaking to the audience.



Mr. Aqil Sajjad, Research Scientist, University of Arizona, USA speaking to the audience.



Mr. Zakir Syed, Director (Internet Governance), MoIT presenting a shield to Mr. Aqil Sajjad, Research Scientist, University of Arizona, USA.



Mr. Waqas Hassan, Vice-Chair, Asia-Pacific School on Internet Governance speaking with the participants of the training in the picture.



Mr. Waqas Hassan, Vice-Chair, Asia-Pacific School on Internet Governance speaking with the participants of the training in the picture.



Ms. Risham Arif Raja, Country Director, DeafTawk speaking to the audience.



Mr. Zahid Abdullah, Former Federal Information Commissioner, and Advisor, CPDI speaking to the audience.

